DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 475 822 SO 034 746

AUTHOR	Sewall, Gilbert T.
TITLE	Islam and the Textbooks. A Report of the American Textbook Council.
INSTITUTION	American Textbook Council, New York, NY.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	36p.
AVAILABLE FROM	American Textbook Council, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 448, New York, NY 10115. Tel: 212-870-2760; e-mail: atc@columbia.edu. For full text: http://www.historytextbooks.org/islam.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Content Analysis; *Cultural Context; Foreign Countries; *Islam; *Muslims; Non Western Civilization; Secondary Education; *Textbook Content; *Textbook Evaluation; *World History
IDENTIFIERS	Massachusetts; *Middle East; State Level Textbook Adoption

ABSTRACT

How widely adopted world history textbooks cover Islam and the history of the Middle East is a timely and important subject to explore. In 2001 the American Textbook Council began a comprehensive review of middle school and high school world history textbooks. The Council relied on respected historians and standard sources, influential articles and essays, and diverse bulletins. The Council compared the content of these sources to lessons and textual passages in seven widely adopted world history textbooks used between the 7th and 12th grades. It also conducted an extensive Web search of Islam-related source material intended for classroom use. What the comparison revealed were content distortions and inaccuracies that have not occurred by accident. These lessons and the process by which they are put into U.S. classrooms raise serious concerns about the integrity of world history as a subject. On controversial subjects, world history textbooks make an effort to circumvent unsavory facts that might cast Islam past or present in anything but a positive light. Islamic achievements are reported with robust enthusiasm, but when any dark side surfaces, textbooks run and hide. Domestic educational activists who call themselves multiculturalists seek a revised world history curriculum. If world history is to examine all cultures, non-western civilizations should be subject to the same standards of achievement and criticism, codes of right and wrong, and ideals of social justice as the west. Appended is: "Teaching Islamic History: An Outline" (Fred M. Donner). (Contains 26 notes.) (BT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 475 822

ISLAM AND THE TEXTBOOKS

By Gilbert T. Sewall

A REPORT OF THE AMERICAN TEXTBOOK COUNCIL

SO 034 746

© 2003 American Textbook Council

American Textbook Council
475 Riverside Drive, Room 448
New York, New York 10115
(212) 870-2760
atc@columbia.edu
www.historytextbooks.org/islam

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. T. Sewall

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Texts Reviewed

World History and Cultures textbooks aimed at 7th to 9th grade:

Greenblatt, Miriam and Peter S. Lemmo. *Human Heritage.* Glencoe, 2001.

Nash, Gary B., Beverly J. Armento, J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Christopher L. Salter, Louis E. Wilson, and Karen K. Wixson. *Across the Centuries.* Houghton Mifflin, 1994.

Ahmad, Iftikhar, Herbert Brodsky, Marylee Susan Crofts, and Elisabeth Gaynor Ellis, *A Global Mosaic*, Prentice Hall, 2001.

World History textbooks aimed at 10th to 12th grade:

Beck, Roger B., Linda Black, Larry S. Krieger, Phillip C. Naylor, and Dahia Ibo Shabaka. *Patterns of Interaction*. McDougal Littell, 1999. (Texas Edition, 2003)

Ellis, Elisabeth Gaynor and Anthony Esler. *Connections to Today*. Prentice Hall, 2001. (Texas Edition, 2003)

Farah, Mounir A. and Andrea Berens Karls. *The Human Experience*. Glencoe, 1999.

Hanes, William Travis, III. *Continuity and Change*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1999.

CONTENTS

Texts Reviewed 3

I. Introduction 4

II. What the Textbooks Say 5

- Jihad
- Sharia
- Slavery
- Status of Women

III. The Case of Massachusetts 20

IV. Why Textbooks Changed 23

V. Conclusions 27

- A Double Standard
- Unanswered Questions
- Recovering History

Appendix 32

- Teaching Islamic History: An Outline
  by Fred M. Donner

I. Introduction

Starting in the summer of 2001, the American Textbook Council undertook a comprehensive textbook review in world history. World history is a controversial social studies mandate that is rapidly expanding at the state level. *Islam and the Textbooks* grows out of this larger work still in progress surveying many aspects of world history textbook content. How widely adopted world history textbooks cover Islam and the history of the Middle East is a timely and important subject for students to learn about. On account of geopolitics and globalization, they should know something about the religion and its domain. The Council's findings and conclusions rely on respected historians and standard sources, prominent articles and essays, and diverse bulletins.[1]

The Council compared the content of these sources to lessons and textual passages in seven widely adopted world history textbooks used between the seventh and twelfth grades. It also conducted an extensive web search of Islam-related source material intended for classroom use. The books surveyed include Prentice Hall's *Connections to Today* and McDougal Littell's *Patterns of Interaction*, two high school textbooks that lead the November 2002 Texas adoption list. What the comparison revealed were content distortions and inaccuracies that have not occurred by accident. These lessons and the process by which they are put into America's classrooms raise serious concerns about the integrity of world history as a subject.

---

[1] Notably, Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (Oxford, 1991), *Race and Slavery in the Islamic World* (Oxford, 1994), *The Middle East* (Touchstone, 1997), *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford, 2002), also his article, "The Revolt of Islam," *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, and a Lewis interview in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, September 11, 2002; Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations* (Penguin, 1995); Foreign Policy Research Institute reports and essays, including those by Adam Garfinkle, James Kurth, Walter MacDougall, and a November 2002 review by Stanley Michalak of terrorism as it is covered in college-level international relations textbooks, all available at *www.fpri.org*; Ethics and Public Policy Center, *Islam: A Primer*, September 2002, available at *www.eppc.org*; Fareed Zakaria in *Foreign Affairs* and *Newsweek*, notably in the latter, "Why They Hate Us," October 15, 2001; Mark Lilla, "Extremism's Theological Roots," *New York Times*, October 7, 2001; Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America* (Norton, 2002); Fred M. Donner, *Islamic History: Problems and Ideals in Schools* (American Textbook Council, 1990).

The complicated subject of Islam has captured the attention of teachers and professors, public policy experts, and religious organizations. This is not surprising in light of twenty-first century geopolitics. But few teachers have at their disposal anything more than a faint knowledge of Islam. Generally speaking, they do not feel comfortable teaching about religion and try to avoid all aspects of the subject. But state mandates expect or require them to teach something about Islam. Texas, for example, mandates a world cultures course for the state's sixth graders.

How classrooms deal with Islamic aggression is an unresolved school-related question of great importance. It is complicated by pressure from educational groups which assume that geopolitical problems originate in U.S. policy and its exertion of power abroad. The National Association of School Psychologists declares that "history shows us that intolerance only causes harm. Some of our country's darkest moments resulted from prejudice and intolerance for our own people because Americans acted out of fear. We must not repeat terrible mistakes such as our treatment of Japanese Americans and Arab Americans during times of war." Teachers and parents are urged to "discuss historical instances of American intolerance. Internment of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor and the backlash against Arab Americans during the Gulf War are obvious examples."[2] These formulations are open to question, but constrained by such premises and claims, instructors fall back on the themes of tolerance and apology. Such sentiment may be a commendable aim in itself, but in the case of Islam, perhaps more so than other areas of social studies, these are lessons that skirt the reality of international affairs and threats to world peace.

U.S. officials have assured Muslims in word and deed that the U.S. is a tolerant and open-minded nation. They have stressed the distinction between apolitical Muslim citizens and a belligerent Islamic agenda, and they have avoided branding Islam as the enemy. But it is not without reason that many U.S. citizens sense that militant Islam's goals run counter to national

---

[2] *http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/tolerance.html.*

and personal interest.[3] Concern about the ability and willingness of many domestic Muslims to assimilate -- that is, to put American constitutional values in front of their religion -- is not unfounded; Islam may favor resistance and separatism.[4]

Worldwide and in the United States, "mainstream Islamic thought and political practice have developed in a way compatible with international law and orderly, peaceful interaction with non-Muslim nations," Rutgers religion professor James Turner Johnson has said.[5] Islam has as many ideological, spiritual and geographic variations as Christianity and other world religions do. Some Muslims are virtually secularized. Others are not. Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Indonesia, each has a distinctive history. Within the same country, some Muslims are co-operative and co-existent with other cultures and others are at odds with them.

"Most Muslims in principle applaud the decision to present more material on Islam and Islamic history," Fred M. Donner of the University of Chicago noted in 1992. "Nonetheless, their approval is constrained by their own strong views on *how* this material should be presented." As Donner put the matter, "Muslims are sensitive and view any perceived criticism of the prophet's life or character as an attack on Islam itself. Some Muslims are so sensitive about certain points that they may view a fairly straightforward factual presentation as hostile. For example, they resent the suggestion that Islam is a 'religion of violence,' an image dating back to the Middle Ages in Western writings. This literature has presented the faith as 'imposed by the sword,' spread by military conquests in 'holy wars,' and forced on conquered opponents at the threat of 'conversion or death.' . . . Of course, one does not wish to over-emphasize military

---

3 The internet features vitriolic views of American foreign policy, malign Jewish power in the U.S. (political, entertainment and financial), Israel, and homosexuality coming from Islamists living in the U. S., readily available to any seventh grader doing a world history activity.

4 James Kurth, "Domestic Security and Muslim Immigrants," *Journal of the Historical Society*, Summer/Fall 2002, 409 ff.

5 James Turner Johnson, "Jihad and Just War," *First Things*, June/July 2002, 14.

episodes, but to eliminate such references altogether would simply be to replace the stereotype of a 'religion of violence' with an apologetic view that Islam is an early form of pacifism."[6]

The transcontinental Islamic retraction from the liberal democratic model challenges secular rationalism, consensual government, and individual liberty throughout the world. As the novelist Salman Rushdie writes, a "paranoid Islam, which blames outsiders, 'infidels,' for all the ills of Muslim societies, and whose proposed remedy is the closing of those societies to the rival project of modernity, is presently the fastest growing version of Islam in the world."[7]

Rushdie and other liberal Muslims call for the depoliticization of Islam. Like others, they make the important distinction between Islamic political projects and the more politically neutral Muslim religion. But this distinction is more easily urged than realized. "This desire to talk about politics as being separate from Islam is something that Muslim scholars on the whole have never accepted," says Akbar Muhammad, a historian at the State University of New York at Binghamton and a board member of the Council on Islamic Education.[8]

What may seem on the surface to be a minor curriculum controversy has far-reaching implications for civic education and the promotion of U.S. constitutional values. "The only ideal remaining (except in the Muslim world) is liberal democracy on the American model, and this (as the Marxists were wont to say) is not by chance," the political philosopher Walter Berns noted in his 2001 book, *Making Patriots*.[9] But first, before reflecting on what Berns was driving at, consider what the textbooks say.

---

6 Donner, op. cit.

7 Salman Rushdie, "Yes, This Is About Islam," *New York Times*, November 2, 2001. Rushdie then followed with a second opinion piece in the *Times* (November 27, 2002) condemning the silence of Western Muslims "as their ancient, deeply civilized culture of love, art and philosophical reflection is hijacked by paranoiacs, racists, liars, male supremacists, tyrants, fanatics and violence junkies."

8 "Seeking a Global Faith in the Details," *New York Times*, May 9, 2002, quoted in a review of the PBS Frontline documentary, *Muslims*.

II. What the Textbooks Say

Since Donner registered his concerns, the coverage of Islam in world history textbooks has expanded and in some respects improved, offering students a detailed look at the Muslim world through the centuries, one that explains its origins and tenets, including the difference between the Sunni and Shiite sects, and one that dwells on the splendors of Islamic art and architecture, learning and science, medicine and knowledge through the ages. But on significant Islam-related subjects, textbooks omit, flatter, embellish, and resort to happy talk, suspending criticism or harsh judgments that would raise provocative or even alarming questions.

Jihad

In understanding the history and nature of Islam, the concept of jihad is uniquely important. The term embodies an element of friction that exists between many Muslims and non-believers -- Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist -- enmity grounded in Islamic desire for political and territorial power. Jihad in its historical usage refers almost exclusively to armed warfare by Muslims against non-Muslims. Most editorial boards have no difficulty digesting this idea, nor do the nation's political and military elites. On the other hand, many prominent academics deny any martial aspect of the Muslim faith, ignoring or dismissing violent Islamic jihads from Algeria to Indonesia and locating the problem in Western colonialism.

What is jihad? Bernard Lewis, writing in *The Middle East*, states:

> The term *'jihad'*, conventionally translated 'holy war', has the literal meaning of striving, more specifically, in the Qur'anic phrase 'striving in the path of God' (*fi sabil Allah*). Some Muslim theologians, particularly in more modern times, have interpreted the duty of 'striving in the path of God' in a spiritual and moral sense. The overwhelming majority of early authorities, however, citing relevant passages in the Qur'an and in the tradition, discuss *jihad* in military terms. Virtually every

[9] Walter Berns, *Making Patriots* (Chicago, 2001), 8.

> manual of *shari'a* law has a chapter on *jihad*, which regulates in minute detail such matters as the opening, conduct, interruption and cessation of hostilities, and the allocation and division of booty. . . . Even the Christian crusade, often compared with the Muslim *jihad*, was itself a delayed and limited response to the *jihad* and in part also an imitation. But unlike the *jihad* it was concerned primarily with the defence or reconquest of threatened or lost Christian territory. . . . The Muslim *jihad*, in contrast, was perceived as unlimited, as a religious obligation that would continue until all the world had either adopted the Muslim faith or submitted to Muslim rule. In the latter case, those who professed what Muslims recognized as a revealed religion were allowed to continue the practice of that religion, subject to the acceptance of certain fiscal and other disabilities. Those who did not, that is to say idolaters and polytheists, were given the choice of conversion, death or slavery.[10]

Lewis concludes this passage, saying: "The object of *jihad* is to bring the whole world under Islamic law." World history textbooks fail to make this simple but ultra-important point. A 1999 Library of Congress report on global terrorism says of jihad in its glossary:

> An Arabic verbal noun derived from *jahada* ("to struggle"). Although "holy war" is not a literal translation, it summarizes the essential idea of jihad. In the course of the revival of Islamic fundamentalism, the doctrine of jihad has been invoked to justify resistance, including terrorist actions, to combat "un-Islamic" regimes, or perceived external enemies of Islam, such as Israel and the United States.[11]

In U.S. classrooms, jihad is defanged or oversimplified. World history textbook editors formulate definitions uncritically, using guides issued by Islamic advocacy groups as their road maps. According to a Council on Islamic Education subject guide intended for publishers, jihad means "'struggle' or 'exertion' and refers to any spiritual, moral or physical struggle," and "struggle in the cause of God, which can take many forms. In the personal sphere, efforts such as obtaining an education, trying to quit smoking, or controlling one's temper are forms of *jihad*."[12]

---

[10] Lewis, *The Middle East*, 233-234.

[11] Rex A. Hudson et al., *The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?* (Library of Congress, September 1999). *www.loc.gov/rr/frd.*

[12] Council on Islamic Education, *Teaching about Islam and Muslims in the Public School Classroom*, 1998, 49. This compendium of useful information, arcana and elision confines the subjects examined here to a few paragraphs, ignoring slavery.

The term *holy war*, the Council says, is a misrepresentation. Jihad is transformed into an esoteric form of Muslim self-improvement.

A widely adopted seventh-grade Houghton Mifflin world history, *Across the Centuries,* says that jihad is merely a struggle "to do one's best to resist temptation and overcome evil." This interpretation has on its face an element of accuracy; anyone or anything not under Muslim rule and control may be characterized as evil. But this textbook is not in any way exceptional. One high-profile high school textbook, Houghton Mifflin's *Patterns of Interaction*, a world history textbook for high school students adopted in Texas in November 2002, does not even mention jihad, a lapse as noteworthy as any imaginable on the entire subject of Islam.

Prentice Hall's *Connections to Today,* which names the Council on Islamic Education as an editorial reviewer, is the nation's most widely used world history textbook, also adopted by Texas in 2002. The textbook says: "Some Muslims took on *jihad*, or effort in God's service, as another duty. Jihad has often been mistakenly translated simply as 'holy war.' In fact, it may include acts of charity or an inner struggle to achieve spiritual peace, as well as any battle in defense of Islam" (254). Its glossary says: "*jihad*: in Islam, an effort in God's service" (1017). It is inconceivable that a textbook writer would formulate this definition without external prompting from an Islamic source, given the peculiar and vague choice of words and language.[13]

Not all textbook content is this misinformative. Yet other explanations remain opaque and puzzling. Holt, Rinehart and Winston's *Continuity and Change,* a third high school textbook, contains two definitions in one: "One important requirement [of faith] was jihad. Europeans, threatened by Muslim armies, later translated this term as 'holy war,' but a more accurate translation would be 'struggle for the faith.' In the early years of Muslim expansion, however,

[13] The same textbook implies that Arab treatment of conquered people was so enlightened as to constitute good fortune for the conquered (257). It covers the Crusades more evenly in a chapter on the European middle ages and Reconquest but fails to explain the source of the conflicts (215-219).

jihad did mean primarily fighting and dying for the faith. Muslims believed that a warrior who died in battle for the faith would immediately be admitted to paradise. The term also means the constant inner struggle people experience in their effort to obey God's will or any effort in the cause of faith" (256).

Glencoe's *The Human Experience* comes closer to the reality of jihad and its ambitions. "The Arab armies were successful for several reasons. First, they were united in the belief that they had a religious duty to spread Islam. The Islamic state, therefore, saw the conquests as a *jihad*, or holy struggle to bring Islam to other lands" (278). The glossary says: "*jihad:* Muslim struggle to introduce Islam to other lands" (1035). Since this textbook also lists the Council on Islamic Education as an editorial reviewer, it may be concluded that some social studies editors take the Council on Islamic Education's instructions more seriously than others.

Islamic organizations indignantly insist that Islam is a religion of peace. Historical evidence often points to a different conclusion. Much is made of the Koranic injunction against attacks on innocent, unarmed people. Less is made the fact that "enemies" and infidels do not fall under the protective umbrella. The annihilation of Israel and the U.S. may be the just vision and dream. For Muslims who are devoted to victory over the satanic West, this definition of jihad fits quite well.

Sharia

As in the case of jihad, Islamic holy law -- sharia -- is tailored and cut, making an appearance as an alternative legal system or perhaps as a lifestyle. Holy law is explained in abstract, sketchy, and cryptic language that fails to convey the truth of the matter. Of sharia, historically, Bernard Lewis says, "In an Islamic state, there is in principle no law other than the shar'ia, the Holy Law of Islam." Elsewhere, he states, "There is, for example, no distinction between canon law and civil law, between the law of the church and the law of the state, crucial in

Christian history. There is only a single law, the shari'a, accepted by Muslims as of divine origin and regulating all aspects of human life: civil, commercial, criminal, constitutional, as well as matters more specifically concerned with religion in the limited, Christian sense of that word." Lewis adds: "The principal function of the Islamic state and society was to maintain and enforce these rules" and that "the idea that any group of persons, any kind of activities, or any part of human life is in any sense outside the scope of religious law and jurisdiction is alien to Muslim thought."[14]

The Council on Islamic Education ignores all of this. Its construction of sharia is at once cryptic and lyrical: "Literally 'the path,'" says one Council definition, "this term refers to guidance from God to be used by Muslims to regulate their societal and personal affairs. The sharia is based upon the Qur'an and the Sunni of Muhammad, and is interpreted by scholars in deliberating and deciding upon questions and issues of a legal nature."[15] At best, this is an incomplete explanation.

How do world history textbooks define sharia? McDougal Littell's *Patterns of Interaction* contains an absurdly abstract explanation: "This system of law regulates the family life, moral conduct, and business and community life of Muslims. It does not separate religious matters from criminal or civil matters, but brings all aspects of life together. Because shari'a applies to all who follow the teachings of the Prophet, it brings a sense of unity to all Muslims" (237).

Prentice Hall's *Connections to Today* states as vaguely: "Islam has been a shaping force in the Middle East for more than 1,300 years. As in the past, the Quran and Sharia provide guidance on all aspects of life -- from religious faith, law, and government to family and business

---

[14] Lewis, *What Went Wrong?*, 53, 100, *The Middle East,* 224; adds Seton Hall professor Gisela Webb, a sympathetic observer, in "Expressions of Islam in America," Timothy Miller, ed., *America's Alternative Religions* (State University of New York, 1995), 235: "In principle, there is no division between religious and secular law in Islam. All of life is to be oriented toward the Divine Will."

[15] *www.cie.org/resources/hbglossary.htm.*

relationships" (892). Unlike some other textbooks, it offers a clear view of sharia's reach and at least distinguishes it from Western legal traditions:

> This Islamic system of law, called the Sharia, regulated moral conduct, family life, business practices, government, and other aspects of a Muslim community. Like the Quran, the Sharia helped unite the many peoples who converted to Islam. Unlike the law codes that evolved in the west, the Sharia does not separate religious matters from criminal or civil law. The Sharia applies the Quran to all legal situations (255).

These passages are similar in tone and content to Holt, Rinehart and Winston's *Continuity and Change*: "The *shari'ah* guided the personal conduct of all Muslims, including religious observances, marriage, divorce, business affairs, and inheritance. It also outlined the appropriate practices of Islamic government. Adherence to the *shari'ah* soon became one of the most important elements of the Muslims' sense of identity" (257). *Continuity and Change* also says, mixing vagueness and arcana:

> The Qur'an and the sayings and deeds of the Prophet were the most important sources of the *shari'ah*. In cases not covered by these sources, people were to draw a parallel with some case that was covered. The net important source of legal authority was the consensus of the community. Human reason as a means of interpreting the law was to be used only through this highly disciplined process.
>
> Al-Shafi'i was not the only Muslim scholar dealing with these issues. Eventually, four major schools of Islamic legal interpretation emerged -- Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali -- each named for its founder. In later years, these schools of interpretation became associated with particular geographic regions in the Islamic world (258).

Of sharia, *The Human Experience* says merely: "Law cannot be separated from religion in Islamic society. Islam has no ranked order of clergy. Instead, generations of legal scholars have organized Islamic moral principles into a body of law known as the *shari'ah*. Based on the Quran and the Hadith, or sayings of Muhammad, the *shari'ah* covers all aspects of Muslim private and public life" (275).

Such textbook explanations are almost meaningless chatter. What aspects of sharia do most world history textbooks fail to convey? That the Islamic state is an agent of religion. Civil society, separation of church and state, limited government, an independent judiciary, and the underlying notions of personal liberty and individual freedom, notably freedom of religion, are alien concepts. So are such items as due process, trial by jury, and chartered protection.

Holy law is not a variant of jurisprudence as it is known in the U.S. and Western democracies. Sharia bears no resemblance to American law based on the Roman and British constitutions, a tradition that stretches from the second century BCE and Magna Carta to the Bill of Rights and Fourteenth Amendment. *It is not a legal system as Americans understand it.* It is instead an accreted medley of precepts, proscriptions, and religious devotions tied to the Koran, interpreted as dicta by an authoritarian, priestly caste. Sharia can be a system of religion-based behavioral control in which certain crimes are punishable by stoning, flogging, amputation, and beheading, punishments intended to inspire subjection and fear.

Slavery

On the subject of Islamic slavery, world history textbooks steer around a controversial subject, also failing to make any connection between slavery and jihad. Glencoe's *The Human Experience* ignores the subject. Holt, Rinehart and Winston's *Continuity and Change* alludes obliquely to Muslim slavery:

> Included among East African exports were ivory, which was highly prized in many countries; wooden mangrove poles, used for building houses around the Persian Gulf, and small quantities of gold, copper, shells, leopard skins, and coconut oil. They also exported slaves captured in the interior. . . . after about A.D. 1100, Ethiopia once again began to export gold and ivory to Egypt, and myrrh, frankincense, and African slaves to the Arab world (192).

Prentice Hall's *Connections to Today* is more specific:

> As in Greece and Rome, slavery was a common institution in the cities of the Muslim world. Slaves were brought from conquered lands in Spain, Greece, Africa, India, and Central Asia. Muslims could not be enslaved. If non-Muslim slaves converted to Islam, they did not automatically gain their freedom, but their children did. A female slave who married her owner also gained freedom (261).
>
> Like the boys, non-Muslim girls from Eastern Europe were brought to serve as slaves in wealthy Muslim households. There, they might be accepted as members of the households. Some of the enslaved girls were freed after the death of their masters (273).

Such passages beg for more commentary, which might include perhaps a focus on the origin and role of concubines and eunuchs in Muslim society, lessons that would surely excite student interest but that are taboo in the classroom, partly on account of sexual content.

In McDougal Littell's *Patterns of Interaction,* as in other world history textbooks, slavery is presented as essentially a European and American event. It assumes a central position in the history of the Atlantic world after 1500 and is an integral part of the highly contestable "Three Worlds Meet" concept in which American history begins as an encounter of Europeans, Africans and Indians, each equally significant in the development of the nation and culture.

Patterns of Interaction does address the subject of Muslim slavery with facts and details, which no other widely adopted world history textbook does. The following passage introduces "The Atlantic Slave Trade" and antecedes a long special section that explains Three Worlds Meet:

> The spread of Islam into Africa during the seventh century, however, ushered in an increase in slavery and the slave trade. African rulers justified enslavement with the Muslim belief that non-Muslim prisoners of war could be bought and sold as slaves. As a result, between 650 and 1600, black as well as white Muslims transported as many as 4.8 million Africans -- mostly prisoners of war and criminals -- to the Muslim lands of Southwest Asia. Once there, these enslaved Africans worked primarily as domestic servants.

> In most African and Muslim societies, slaves had some legal rights and opportunity for social mobility. In the Muslim world, slaves even occupied positions of influence and power. Some served as generals in the army. Others bought large estates and even owned slaves of their own (495).

These statements are not exactly inaccurate but they are highly misleading. Scholars agree that those millions who were enslaved by Muslims were accorded many more legal protections under Islamic law than they were in the Americas. But these representations stress the exception, not the rule, and they omit any references to the downside of Muslim enslavement. These reductive passages give the impression that Muslim slavery was a benign institution, simply a part of economic life, even a route to influence and power, illustrating the inconsistencies and double standard of multiculturalized world history.

As world history textbooks would have it, slavery is a Western, European and American institution. By contrast, Islamic slavery does not exist or is presented as benign. In fact, by some accounts, from the tenth to the nineteenth century, a larger number of enslaved Africans moved north and east into the Muslim world than into the entire Western Hemisphere from the beginning of the Portuguese slave trade. Slavery was a central part of Islamic civilization, and it may be said that Arabs invented the African slave trade. Child tribute among Christians in the Balkans for centuries provided recruits for the Ottoman janissaries. The number of enslaved Africans transported to Muslim lands between the seventh and nineteenth century has been estimated to be as high as 14 million, a much higher figure than the one used in *Patterns of Interaction*. This compares to an estimated 11 million Africans shipped to the Western Hemisphere after 1650. Slavery in Africa and the Middle East did not disappear with the 1834 British imperial abolition but lasted into the twentieth century. The holy cities of Mecca and Medina remained strongholds of slavery and the slave trade throughout the nineteenth century.[16]

---

[16] Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001); Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Islamic World*, op. cit.

Status of Women

On the one hand, world history textbooks contort themselves to include women in history and amplify their accomplishments, never failing to mention or invent obstacles to their progress and achievements. On the other, textbooks try to explain away or recast any inconvenient detail concerning the treatment of women in the Islamic world that would be considered backward, unacceptable, or even revolting in the West. *Human Heritage*, a world history textbook designed for seventh and eighth grade use, covers the subject in insipid, florid language:

> Islamic society produced some women of great knowledge and power. At the time of the birth of a Muslim baby the call for prayer was recited into the baby's ears. By doing this, the child was brought into the life of Islamic culture. Reciting and memorizing the Quaran was an important requirement in education (342).

But such patter is not confined to elementary and middle schools. Holt, Rinehart and Winston's *Continuity and Change*, a high school textbook, states:

> Although men had most of the power in Arab society, women had some freedom. For example, women could own and inherit property. Women contributed to the group through such activities as spinning and weaving. A woman's primary role, however, was that of mother (245-246).

The points made in Glencoe's *The Human Experience* conform to Islamist prescriptions, mixed with vague propositions and false claims:

> Islam did, however, improve the position of women. It forbade the tribal custom of killing female infants and also limited polygamy, or the practice that allowed a man to have more than one wife. A Muslim could have as many as four wives, but all were to be treated as equals and with kindness. Also, a woman had complete control over her own property. If she were divorced, she could keep the property she had brought with her when she married. A woman could also inherit property from her father and remarry.

> Most women's lives revolved around family and household. Other roles, however, were available to Muslim women, especially among the upper classes. Scholarship was a prominent way for women to win recognition, and many important teachers of Islamic knowledge were women. Women often used their control over property for investment in trade and in financing charitable institutions. The lists of Muslim rulers include a number of prominent women, both as members of the court and as leaders in their own right (282-283).

Prentice Hall's *Connections to Today* provides another example of the treatment of women in the Islamic world:

> Before Islam, the position of women in Arab society varied. In some communities, women took a hand in religion, trade, or warfare. Most women, however, were under the control of a male guardian and could not inherit property. Furthermore, among a few tribes, unwanted daughters were sometimes killed at birth.
>
> Islam affirmed the spiritual equality of women and men. "Whoever does right, whether male or female," states the Quran "and is a believer, all such will enter the Garden." Women therefore won greater protection under the law. The Quran prohibited the killing of daughters. Inheritance laws guaranteed a woman a share of her parents' or husband's property. Muslim women had to consent freely to marriage and had the right to an education. In the early days of Islam, some Arab women participated actively in public life.
>
> Though spiritually equal, men and women had different roles and rights. For example, the amount of an inheritance given to a daughter was less than that given to a son. A woman could seek a divorce, but it was harder for her to get one than for a man. . . . As Islam spread, Arabs sometimes absorbed attitudes from the peoples they conquered. In Persian and Byzantine lands, Arabs adopted the practice of veiling upper-class women and secluding them in a separate part of the home. There, they managed the affairs of the household but seldom ventured out. Still, as in other cultures, women's lives varied according to region and class. Veiling and seclusion were not so strictly followed among lower-class city women. In rural areas, peasant woman continued to contribute to the economy in many ways (255).

Much of this passage can be disputed. But facts aside, does no editor at Prentice Hall have an eye for the callousness of the last sentence? Or is this what editors call "even-

handedness"? *Connections to Today* continues, mixing fact and fiction, fogging the wretched, exploited condition of women in many parts of the Muslim world:

> Conditions for women vary greatly from country to country in the modern Middle East. Since the 1950s, women in most countries have won voting rights and equality before the law. They attend schools and universities in growing numbers. Middle- and upper-class women have entered professions such as law, engineering, and medicine.
>
> The changes have taken place at different rates in different places. In Turkey, Syria, and Egypt, many urban women gave up long-held practices such as wearing *hejab*, or cover.
>
> On the other hand, conservative countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran have opposed the spread of many western secular influences among women.
>
> In recent decades, many educated Muslim women have returned to wearing hejab. For some women, the movement symbolized resistance to unpopular governments or a refusal to imitate western culture. "I think of Muslim dress as a kind of uniform," one Egyptian student said. "I can sit in class with men and there is no question of attraction and so on--we are all involved in the same business of learning." Most important, women who elected to return to hejab saw it as an expression of sincere loyalty to Muslim values and practices.
>
> Still, some women in Muslim countries were dismayed. They argued against social and political forces that put severe limits on their lives.
>
> Under Sharia law, women traditionally held powerful positions in the family and played important economic roles. In some countries, though, laws and traditions emerged that limited women's right to vote, work, or even drive cars. Many Muslim and non-Muslim women spoke out on the need for women to realize their full potential and contribute to national life (893).

Not in one textbook but in many, teachers and students read about obscure figures such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, a Sufi poetess of the eighth century (*Continuity and Change*, 258; *Connections to Today*, 263); Shajar (*Human Heritage*, 341), a thirteenth century freed slave who is said to have become ruler of Egypt; Maisuna (*The Human Experience*, 283), a Bedouin poetess who is presented as a proto-feminist; and Tansu Ciller (*The Human Experience*, 965), the first

female prime minister of Turkey. Textbook editors' relentless search to find such historical figures deforms and cheapens world history. But such gender conventions are embedded in the history textbook editorial and design process across all civilizations and centuries.

What is missing from world history textbooks? That Muslim women today are seen by many men to be not much more than chattel; that, for these men, women are fit to be servants and breeders; and that a wife's autonomy is interpreted as a sign of female disobedience and disrespect. *Patterns of Interaction* includes a two-page four-color folio of photographs with "educational" captions of "Wedding Rituals Around The World." (Remember the kind of light, pictorial subject matter that textbook editors incline toward in the first place.) A bridal fair among Berbers in Morocco is presented as a happy quirk of local custom in which courtship lasts three days. What goes unsaid is that such "bridal fairs" are essentially places where marriages are arranged and where fathers negotiate dowries (essentially selling their daughters). Grooms take home brides sheathed in burkas, henceforth to serve and obey and breed. Here is one more example of textbook unwillingness or inability to confront profound questions regarding the status of Muslim women, sidestepping the issues with the exotic and picturesque.

III. The Case of Massachusetts

Another battle in the textbook wars is being fought not in editorial offices but in state capitals. Curricula must often pass muster with state boards and educational bureaucracies. Their mandates influence textbook publishers. As are state legislatures, appointed officials are responsive to local political pressure.

The state of Massachusetts, for example, spent 2001 and 2002 revising its 1997 state history framework. On the subject of the Middle East, later designated Central Asia in the framework, this is the nation's most detailed state curriculum. Draft guidelines originally published in December 2001 were criticized by friendly critics as obscure (ME 3), vague (ME 4),

complex (ME 5), or cryptic (ME 6-9).[17] But the Massachusetts scope and sequence review process provided a unique opportunity to craft a detailed world history program. The state's educational leaders and board of education sought a strong history-centered approach. In the final curriculum framework, approved in October 2002, language and concepts were strengthened, but the essential content of the earlier draft (reproduced below) remained intact, largely because the state's commitment to honest history was not blunted by pressure groups that have been spectacularly successful in other states.

During the process the Massachusetts world history curriculum came under attack from activists who protested the Islam-related draft content, calling it racist and biased. Remarkably, the pro-Islamists were not Muslims but were led by Barbara Brown of the Boston University African Studies Center and Barbara Petzen of the Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies. The seventh grade section (7.32-7.35), specifically the section entitled *Two Worlds Meet: Christianity and Islam (600 AD to 1492 AD),* offended them.[18] So did high-school level WH15, 57, and 64.[19] What follows were three principal complaints registered to Massachusetts during the public review process and the state response, printed in italics.

---

[17] ME.3 Locate and describe the major ethnic and religious groups of the Middle East, and the small Christian groups such as the Armenians, Chaldeans, and Maronites. ME.4 Give an example of how one Middle Eastern country has used or controlled its natural resources and describe the effects on commerce, industry, settlement, health, and standard of living. ME.5 Compare the form and structure of government for Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and Israel. ME.6 Compare the position of women in Turkey, Iraq, Israel, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. ME.7 Identify the methods used to compensate for the scarcity of water in some areas. ME.8 Identify where the Kurds live and what their political aspirations are. ME.9 Describe the reasons for the flight of about 650,000 Arabs from Israel during its War of Independence in 1948, and the reasons for the flight of over 800,000 Jews in Arab countries to Israel after 1948.

[18] *Two Worlds Meet: Christianity and Islam (600 AD to 1492 AD):* 7.32 Describe the religious and political origins of the conflict between Islam and Christianity. 7.33 Explain the causes, course, and consequences of the European Crusades against Islam in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. 7.34 Evaluate the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the 14th and 15th century, including the capture of Constantinople in 1453. 7.35 Analyze the decline of Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula and the subsequent rise of Spanish and Portuguese kingdoms after the Reconquest in 1492.

[19] *The Growth and Decline of Islamic Empires, 1500-1700:* WH15. Explain the reasons for the declining strength of the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century, including the failed siege of Vienna in 1683, and the inability of the Muslim world to keep pace with European economic, political, and intellectual growth.

Cold War, 1945-1989: WH57. Explain the background for the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948, including the UN vote to partition the western part of the Palestine Mandate into two independent countries, the rejection of surrounding Arab countries to the UN decision, and the subsequent military and political conflicts between Israel and the Arab world.

(1) The first concern is that the standards in grade 7 generally present Islam in a warlike manner -- that the focus is on violence and the clash between Islam and the West, and not on cultural and economic interaction. *This concern is misplaced. The standards refer to the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and to the trade routes that connected East and West, as well as the influence of Islamic civilization on science, philosophy, and math. But the standards also, appropriately, refer to Islamic military expansion and to the enormous and important conflict between the Christian world and Islam. One can avoid these subjects -- and the subject of the unique origins of Islam as both a religious and a political/military movement -- by inflicting inaccuracies on history.*

(2) A second, more specific concern, is with high school standard WH15. *This standard has been attacked as being insensitive and even racist. But it is nothing but accurate and it comes right out of Bernard Lewis's* What Went Wrong? *One could say that the Islamic world was more interested in abiding by the Koran than it was in "keeping pace" with Europe. But one can not argue that the Islamic world experienced anything like the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. Even the French historian Fernand Braudel wrote that Islam failed to "keep pace" with Europe, that it has dropped "two centuries behind Europe" economically, and that it "has to modernize. . . ." (see Fernand Braudel,* A History of Civilizations, *Chapter 6).*

(3) A third concern is with the contemporary Middle East, particularly WH57 that refers to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and to WH64 that refers to the "increase in terrorist attacks against Israel." *This is an issue of intense political debate. Some individuals do not think it is appropriate to refer to suicide bombers as terrorists (they are, instead, "freedom*

The Contemporary World, 1989-2001: WH64. Analyze the major events and forces in the Middle East in the 1990s, including the weakness and fragility of the oil-rich Persian Gulf states (including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and others); the origins of the Persian Gulf War; the post-war actions of Saddam Hussein; the financial support of

fighters"). These same individuals want to ignore the long and well documented resistance to Israel on the part of Arab states -- despite Israel's many efforts to establish peace (most recently at Camp David in 2000).

Massachusetts teachers or the public did not share pro-Islamic concerns. These positions were, instead, expressed by a small, militant but loud group of educators more interested in promoting a marginal political agenda than in promoting truth or improving the curriculum. Historians and state officials in Massachusetts resisted these ideological assaults. But from Sacramento, California, to Richmond, Virginia, wherever significant school-level history reform movements have surfaced, such pro-Islamic initiatives have played out, reworking classroom views of Islam and plaguing the teaching of Western civilization.

IV. Why Textbooks Changed

During the last decade, for good reasons, world history textbooks have rapidly expanded their coverage of non-Western civilizations. European political history, educators agree, is not a sufficient curriculum. State frameworks from California to Massachusetts have acted as incentives to improved scope and sequence. But what constitutes the right balance between Western and non-Western lessons continues to vex curriculum experts. Multicultural activists, academic scholars, and textbook editors, in the words of UCLA historian Gary B. Nash, are determined to "redistribute historical capital" and politicize historical content. As a result of revisionist demands made during the 1990s, students today are likely to obtain a rose-colored version of African, Middle Eastern, and Asian history. Textbook editors routinely adjust perspective and outlook to advance the illusion of cultural equivalency and demonstrate cross-cultural and global sensitivity.

---

terrorist organizations by the Saudis, the attempts to secure peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and the increase in terrorist attacks against Israel and the United States.

Multiculturalism's universal appeal at the beginning of the 1990s lay in its pledge to broaden the nation's understanding of the past and improve the balance of old and new history. A dozen years later, social studies curricula may present Western civilization, the American nation, and industrial democracy as negative and exploitative historical forces. Constitutional values such as government by consent, rule of law, a loyal opposition, separation of church and state, and human rights go unnoticed or are shown up for their lapses, even as most American parents, voters, and school boards still believe the nation to be a sentinel of opportunity and freedom.

A large part of Islamic political action in the U.S. involves the symbolism of contemporary victimization, using "discrimination" and "abrogation of civil rights" as chips. Lecturing other Americans on the historical evils of xenophobia and racism is a versatile and reliable political tool. Organized Muslims assert they are persecuted, mocked and ridiculed, stereotyped, subjected to smear campaigns, and victimized by hate crimes. Anti-Muslim "McCarthyism" is in the air, according to the Committee on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a view echoed by Stanford historian Joel Beinin, president of the Middle East Studies Association.[20] Historians and foreign policy specialists who describe dire aspects of Islam risk ad hominem attacks as Zionists, imperialists, and bigots.

The Council on Islamic Education, based in Orange County, California, rides the diversity movement in social studies. It presents itself as a mainstream Muslim organization, linking itself to established educational associations, and it claims to act as Islam's liaison to the nation's public schools. The Department of the Treasury and Internal Revenue Service roster of recognized tax-exempt organizations (501c3) does not list the Council on Islamic Education. No Form 990 is on record. The Council on Islamic Education is funded by domestic Islamic donors

---

[20] Joel Beinin, "An Obligation to Question Prevailing Wisdom," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 2001.

perhaps aided by foreign support. The self-declared "resource center" is in fact a political advocacy organization.

The Council on Islamic Education's board members make no bones about their view of United States history: "American children need to know that genocide was part of the birth of this nation," wrote board member Ali A. Mazrui of the State University of New York at Binghamton, commenting on the New York state social studies curriculum in the early 1990s. "The Holocaust began at home."[21] Council on Islamic Education founder and director Shabbir Mansuri declared in a 2001 interview that he took calls for improved American history and civic education after 9/11 to be a personal attack. He boasted that he is waging a "bloodless" revolution, promoting world cultures and faiths in America's classrooms.[22] The Council on Islamic Education has staged displays of Muslim prayer for television cameras at California textbook hearings. It has warned scholars and public officials who do not sympathize with its requests that they will be perceived as racists, reactionaries, and enemies of Islam.

The Council on Islamic Education is part of the textbook terrain today, a content gatekeeper with virtually unchecked power over publishers. It advises activists in schools to generate grass-roots teacher support, to leave a paper trail, to affect cordiality, and to insist on meeting with educational officials. The Council similarly "works with" publishers to ensure they meet a certain standard of sensitivity -- the Council on Islamic Education standard.

The Council on Islamic Education is an agent of contemporary censorship.[23] It demands "ground rules upon which interaction with publishers can take place." It warns that it may

---

21 Ali A. Mazrui, "Multiculturalism and Comparative Holocaust," *One Nation, Many Peoples: A Declaration of Cultural Interdependence*, New York State Social Studies Review, June 1991, 41 ff.

22 Nick Schou, "Pulling His Cheney," *OC [Orange County] Weekly*, vol. 7, no. 8, October 26, 2001.

23 In the collective mind of school publishers, domestic Christian activists serve as a primary or exclusive content menace, the censors that need be feared. To make a cross-cultural comparison, Prentice Hall's *Connections to Today* states: "Like Christian fundamentalists in the West, many devout Muslims opposed any scientific view of the world that excluded belief in God as creator and ruler of the universe. They also urged political restructuring to put power in the hands of religious leaders" (892).

"decline requests for reviewing published materials, unless a substantial and substantive revision is planned by the publisher."[24] For more than a decade, history textbook editors have done the Council's bidding, and as a result, history textbooks accommodate Islam on terms that Islamists demand. This is all the more disturbing since the Council has a curious view of the nation and world whose history it wants to rewrite.

Since its creation in 1989, the Council has repeatedly allied itself with academics and journalists who take an antagonistic view of the U.S. and Western civilization. Empowered by them, it pushes to make changes in textbook content in the name of inclusion, diversity, restitution, expiation, and other public virtues unique to the non-Muslim world. In the spirit of cultural democracy, credulous first amendment organizations likewise believe they should include Muslim representatives as "stakeholders." They enable the Council on Islamic Education *faute de mieux,* not considering the contradictions with their own principles.

High-profile publishers and editors at Houghton Mifflin, Scott Foresman, Glencoe, and Prentice Hall asked for the Council on Islamic Education imprimatur between 1987 and 1997. Sympathetic and willing to listen, even endorse, on the record, when they were in charge of producing first-edition textbooks that are now well established in the nation's classrooms, including textbooks whose revised editions were adopted by the state of Texas in November 2002: Sue Miller, executive editor, Holt, Rinehart and Winston; Abigail Jungreis, editorial director for social studies, Houghton Mifflin; Judith Glickman, editorial director at Macmillan McGraw-Hill; Anne Falzone, editorial director for Prentice Hall; and Sharon Barton, executive director for Scott Foresman.

School publishers' response to Islamic pressure -- and domestic identity politics in general -- is co-operative and acquiescent. According to one Prentice Hall editor who objected to

---

[24] *www.cie.org/resources/policies.htm.*

policies on Islam-related content, opposition is "silenced" and Islam is given a "free pass." Publishers fear that the label of xenophobia, racism, nativism, or ethnocentricity may affix to their products and reputations. Almost without thinking, or thinking solely in venal terms of political expediency, sales and adoptions, social studies editors are giving American children and their teachers a misshapen view of the past and a false view of the future.

V. Conclusions

On controversial subjects, world history textbooks make an effort to circumvent unsavory facts that might cast Islam past or present in anything but a positive light. Islamic achievements are reported with robust enthusiasm. When any dark side surfaces, textbooks run and hide. Subjects such as jihad and the advocacy of violence among militant Islamists to attain worldly ends, the imposition of sharia law, the record of Muslim enslavement, and the brutal subjection of women are glossed over. Textbooks use language and concepts so similar to Islamic content guides that it appears they are lifting content broadly and uncritically from them. Either they or ignorant staff writers are taking these guides to be authoritative and factually correct.

A Double Standard

World history textbooks hold Islam and other non-Western civilizations to different standards than those that apply to the West. Domestic educational activists, Muslim and non-Muslim, who call themselves multiculturalists, seek a revised world history curriculum. They insist on harsh perspectives for the West while gilding the record of non-Western civilizations. For Islamists, the kind of cultural criticism and analysis that enchants American academics is unimaginable: indeed, it seems to activate rage and loathing. These academics ignore the dire consequences for any Muslims living in Islamic states who speak critically of their government or religion. Their allies are academic historians, first amendment organizations, educational associations and social studies experts that entertain romantic views of the Third World and

skeptical views of the U.S. But above all, their collaborators are a handful of textbook editors in social studies and world history who determine what basic instructional materials used in classrooms nationwide say about Islamic history and its significance for the twenty-first century. During the last two decades, world history textbooks and the social studies editors who oversee their development have moved from the neglect of Islamic history to self-censorship. Any textbook negatives about Islam have been erased, replaced by fulsome praise and generalities designed to quell complaints from Islamists and their allies.

Unanswered Questions

"We live in a time when great efforts are being made to falsify the record of the past and to make history a tool of propaganda; when governments, religious movements, political parties, and sectional groups of every kind are busy rewriting history as they would wish it to have been," Bernard Lewis wrote more than a decade ago.[25] Few textbook editors heeded this admonition, which stepped on the idea of cultural equivalency. As a result, American students lose the chance to compare American and "Western" constitutional values -- favorably, one would hope, even triumphally -- to other political systems and ideologies. Moreover, profound questions that have bearing on history, current affairs, and the near future remain unanswered:

- Why have Muslims provoked fear in adjacent civilizations since the seventh century?
- Why do Muslims so often have difficulty living with their neighbors?
- Why do Islamic governments have greater power and authority over their subjects than in the past? Is militant Islam a totalitarian movement?
- Are the concepts of religious toleration, separation of church and state, and freedom of thought preconditions for other freedoms and liberties?
- Why are liberal elements in much of the Muslim world, including Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, on the defensive?

---

[25] Bernard Lewis, "Other People's History," *Islam and the West*, 130.

- How does Muslim oil influence international politics? Petroleum and its royalties have dominated the politics of the Middle East for eighty years: why is this so and why is this unlikely to change?

Islam's ill will toward Western power, notably Israel and the United States, reflects a long quarrel with modernity, a source of friction that extends beyond religion. Islamic militants reject the principles on which the West has organized itself and much of the world. The Arab-based complaint against the West extends back to Napoleon, to the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution. The Middle East and Israel as they are constituted in the early twenty-first century are the legacy of English and French diplomats in the years that followed World War I, forced upon an expiring Ottoman empire. Today a recrudescent Islam is exported across continents. The situation is complicated by Muslim oil, on which the U.S. and world's agriculture, hydraulics and transportation depend.

Recovering History

If world history is to examine all cultures, non-Western civilizations should be subject to the same standards of achievement and criticism, codes of right and wrong, and ideals of social justice as the West. But this is not the case, and the resulting double standard leads to evasions and lies in lessons involving the Third World. Textbook editors tread lightly on Islamic (and other non-Western) institutions that would be vigorously condemned if they were practiced in the Western world. Why are these text producers suspending or contradicting their principles? The apparent answer is that multiculturalism and "cross-cultural sensitivity" trump all other themes in today's social studies and civic education. Thus, doctored curricula and altered world history textbooks prevail.

How world history textbooks confect Islam and how this happens are dual concerns. The corruption of history and social studies textbooks suggests a more obvious civic problem than it

did before the 2001 air attacks on New York City and Washington. Not too long ago, "who are we" as a nation seemed to be an important but essentially academic question. Now it appears to be a public matter whose answer will in part determine the United States' vitality in the future, its outlook toward power, and its definition of an international role in the twenty-first century. If not the Council on Islamic Education or Council on American-Islamic Relations, some force in the nation's Muslim educational community should help textbook editors explain Islam, not try to trim history in order to inflate and misrepresent its intentions and institutions.

How Islamic civilization chooses to co-exist with the world community and the U.S. in the twenty-first century has major implications for national and international security. A failure to face this fact may tranquilize domestic anxiety and advance the idea of human fellowship. Domestic Islamists and their allies seek to dampen critical analysis of Islam inside and outside the classroom. Distorted world history textbooks are a symptom of this phenomenon.

❖ ❖ ❖

In American classrooms, it is complacency, not anti-Americanism, that is ascendant. Students and teachers alike are sedated by textbook happy talk. They encounter and take as truth an incomplete, shallow or falsified version of Islamic society and law. In brief sections on terrorism, world history textbooks cite examples of Japan, Northern Ireland, Oklahoma City, blending militant Islam by nation and incident into a global stew. These evasions make it difficult or impossible for teachers and students to grasp the broad nature of global security and geopolitical conflict.

There are blueprints for curricular redesign (see appendix). Content outlines offer well conceived and constructed points of departure, even if terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism remain contested subjects inside and outside the classroom. Fred M. Donner has made a succinct and cogent case for studying Islam and the Muslim world:

> First, it is one of the world's major religions, claiming the allegiance of about a billion people, that is, one-fifth of humanity. Second, Muslims and Islamic states have decisively affected world history. Third, Islam has interacted much more closely with Western civilization than have East Asian and South Asian religions. Indeed, this interaction has been so close at times that it is fair to consider the Islamic tradition and the Western tradition as two variants on a number of common religious themes, including the concepts of monotheism, divine law, revealed scripture, last judgment, and an afterlife.

A major problem, said Donner, was that "most Americans lack even minimal knowledge of Islam, of Muslims, and of Islamic history. In its place one finds either total ignorance or, worse, widespread misconceptions, some of them age-old." Therefore, Donner concluded:

> The teacher, then, must strive to take Muslims' justified sensitivities into account, without capitulating to them and rewriting the historical record in a misguided desire to compensate for past inaccuracies. Controversial issues such as Islam's treatment of women, the status of non-Muslims in Islamic society, slavery, and the relationship of religious to political authority should not be ignored or sanitized. Precisely because they are so controversial, they offer the teacher the greatest opportunity truly to teach. Nothing is guaranteed to open students' eyes like dismantling misconceptions, discrediting stereotypes, and exchanging honest differences of opinion. Finally, lest we forget, Muslims differ among themselves on many issues, just as Christians do. No one can hope to present the essence of 'true Islam,' since after all it is a matter of theological debate among Muslims. Ultimately, it is a matter of faith rather than objective reality. Consequently, the teacher must try to be fair to the beliefs, aspirations, and actual practices of various Muslim communities in various times and places, as reflected in their history, their societies, their laws, and their works of literature and arts.[26]

Until social studies educators and textbook editors open their eyes and minds, not only will Donner's vision remain unfulfilled. In regard to Islam past and present, the distortions and evasions that infect the current generation of world history textbooks will continue and perhaps grow worse.

---

[26] Donner, op. cit.

Appendix

Teaching Islamic History: An Outline

By Fred M. Donner

The following outline was prepared for the American Textbook Council during early state and national discussions of revised world history standards and was published in an abridged version in the Social Studies Review *(Number 6) in Fall 1990.*

1. *Geography.* As background, students need to know the physical and enthnographic features of the regions in which Islam has played a major role--particularly the Middle East and North Africa, but also much of Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Balkans. Just as a student of American history would have trouble understanding the significance of Sherman's March to the Sea if he thought Atlanta was in Massachusetts or Ohio, so the student of Islamic history will be lost without an idea of the location of such places as Mecca, Damascus, and Baghdad, not to mention Cairo, Istanbul, Delhi, Fez, and Cordoba. From the jungles and rice paddies of the Caspian coast of Iran to the high mountains of Anatolia or the Atlas, the terrain is varied, not the singular terrain of an endless desert inhabited by camel-herding nomads, an image imbedded in the American mind.

2. *The Prophet Muhammad.* There is no better, or more essential, topic with which to introduce a unit on Islam than the life of Muhammad. First, Islam as we know it begins with Muhammad's preaching. Second, Islamic law is founded largely on Muhammad's actions and sayings, so millions of Muslims over the centuries have studied his life as a model for their own conduct. Third, it is a fascinating life story, which can be used to illuminate many tenets of the Islamic faith as well as some universal human themes. Important topics include the question of God's revelations as Muhammad's main motivation; his courage in challenging the polytheism and materialism of his kinsmen in Mecca; the way he and his followers dealt with persecution; his establishment of a new community of believers in Medina; his consolidation of power in Medina and the relationship of religion to politics in this process; his long struggle against, and ultimate victory, over Mecca; and his initiatives against outlying Arabian tribes toward the end of his life. Selected passages from the Koran (Quar'an) can help illustrate Muhammad's teachings and bring them to life.

3. *Beliefs and Practices.* Students should be introduced to the basic tenets of belief in Islam, including the Pillars of Wisdom, and the concept of Islamic law, which establishes norms for the believer's life conduct, sometimes in minute detail. The customs and traditions of Islam include many strict rituals and standards that cover diet, marriage, divorce, and enterprise. Through such study young people may begin to understand Islam as a way of life, and the study of different customs helps to illustrate differences between Islamic and Judeo-Christian culture.

4. *The Spread of Islam.* The early conquests, after the death of the Prophet in 632, are an historical brainteaser of the first order. How was such a small Muslim community, based in such a poor region, able to defeat the two great powers of the Near East in quick succession, driving one, the Byzantine empire, out of its strongholds in Syria, Egypt, and North Africa, and completely overthrowing the other, the Sasanian Persian empire? What motivated the conquerors--religious zeal, or desire for booty, captives, and new land? Above all, how was it possible for the tiny elite of Muslims to have such a decisive long-term effect on the vast areas they conquered? The early conquests, however, have sometimes been used to illustrate Islam as a "violent religion," so teachers should stress that what was being spread by the sword was not the Islamic faith itself but the political dominance of a new Islamic state. Most of the peoples subjugated by the Muslims in this first phase of expansion were Christians, Jews, or Zoroastrians, who were allowed to practice their own religions and to regulate their own communal affairs, in exchange for payment of a tax to the Muslim authorities. The mass of conversions that made Near Eastern and North African people overwhelmingly Muslim occurred gradually over the next several centuries and owed far more to economic and social advantages, and perhaps to the simplicity and attractiveness of Islam itself, than they did to outright coercion.

5. *The Brilliance of Islamic Civilization.* Students should be made aware that Islam inspired a rich civilization that was at its height in the seventh through fifteenth century, at a time when European civilization at best was rude. Muslim theologians, jurists, and philosophers grappled with the great questions of good and evil, human responsibility, social order, and the meaning of life and death. Muslim mathematicians, physicians, and engineers made advances in these fields that Europe would later borrow freely. Muslim poets and writers penned magnificent expressions of love and hate, joy and sorrow, hope and fear, and the foibles of humanity. Muslim architects, artisans, and artists created works of astonishing beauty, from illustrated Qur'ans to the Taj Mahal.

6. *The Turkish and Mongol Incursions.* In the eleventh century, pressured by movements of other nomadic peoples and drawn by increasing political chaos in the central Islamic lands, Turks began to intervene in the politics of the Iranian

plateau. Through a combination of military conquest and popular migrations, Turks seized control of Iran and Iraq. Later they swept through Asia Minor, wresting it from the Byzantine empire and absorbing many of its indigenous inhabitants. Mongols likewise moved south across Eurasia into the Indian subcontinent. Turks and Mongols brought with them new attitudes toward political legitimacy and statecraft. The old Iranian-Islamic approach to government was hybridized with Turko-Mongol traditions, resulting in a greater militarization of government and a greater emphasis on the autocracy of rulers, helping to shape the practice of governments in many later Muslim states, establishing great empires that represent the culmination of Islamic state-building, from the Ottomans in Asia Minor and the Balkans to the Moguls in India.

7. *The Almoravids.* Another story helps to clarify the reach of Islamic culture in Africa and Europe in the Middle Ages. In the eleventh century Islamic revivalism swept over northwest Africa, present-day Mauritania, Morocco, and Algeria, imposing on all Muslims strict observance of Islamic rituals and law. These Almoravids gained great power. The most powerful Muslim leader in the Islamic West, the Almoravid Ibn Tashfin, based in Marrakech, was invited by the rulers of Islamic Spain to defend them against Christian attacks led by Alfonso VI of Castile. Ibn Tashfin not only repelled the Christian advance but also absorbed all of Islamic Spain into the Almoravid domain. The unification of Muslim North Africa and Spain allowed the highly sophisticated Islamic culture of Spain to flow freely into North Africa, which until then had been a cultural backwater.

8. *Islam and the West.* Islamic states found themselves in contact, and often in conflict, with European states at least from the era of the Crusades up to the mercantile, colonial, and imperial ventures of the modern era. Religious rivalry was often associated with political competition; so, too, was the inevitable exchange of concepts and practices that both sides found stimulating and often provocative. Tracing the fate of Islamic countries at the hands of European imperialism is particularly important, because it offers a backdrop against which one must understand many attitudes current in the Islamic world today. This influence ultimately led to contemporary Islamic culture, including secular pragmatism that attempts to modernize by adopting whatever European technologies and institutions that work, particularly military ones; a liberal reform movement that strives to transform Islamic society from the ground up through constitutionalism and representative government; a virulent ethnic nationalist movement that denies the idea that Islam can truly mobilize a society to resist the West; and a fundamentalism that ascribes the weakness of Islamic states to corruption and deviation from the true God-given ideals of pristine Islam, thereby rejecting the West and all its works. The battle for control of the Suez Canal illustrates this conflict between the West and Islam. Egyptians long resented the canal, which was built at backbreaking cost to them but long benefited European interests over

their own. Fittingly, the canal was the central venue in the final act of an epic imperialism-versus-nationalism play -- the Suez crisis of 1956 -- when Nasser ended the British financial and political role in Egypt. Viewing Nasser's ultimate victory in the crisis in the context of the history of the canal should also make clearer why Nasser, and similar nationalist heroes, have for all their shortcomings been hailed as deliverers.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Islam and the Textbooks	
Author(s): Gilbert T. Sewall	
Corporate Source: American Textbook Council 475 Riverside Drive, Rm 448 New York, NY 10115	Publication Date: 2003

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☑

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) *and* paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature:	Printed Name/Position/Title: Gilbert T. Sewall	
Organization/Address: American Textbook Council 475 Riverside Drive, Rm 448 New York, NY 10115	Telephone: 212-870-2760	FAX: (212) 870-2720
	E-Mail Address: atc@columbia.edu	Date: 3/19/03

(Over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC/CHESS
2805 E. Tenth Street, #120
Bloomington, IN 47408

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2001)